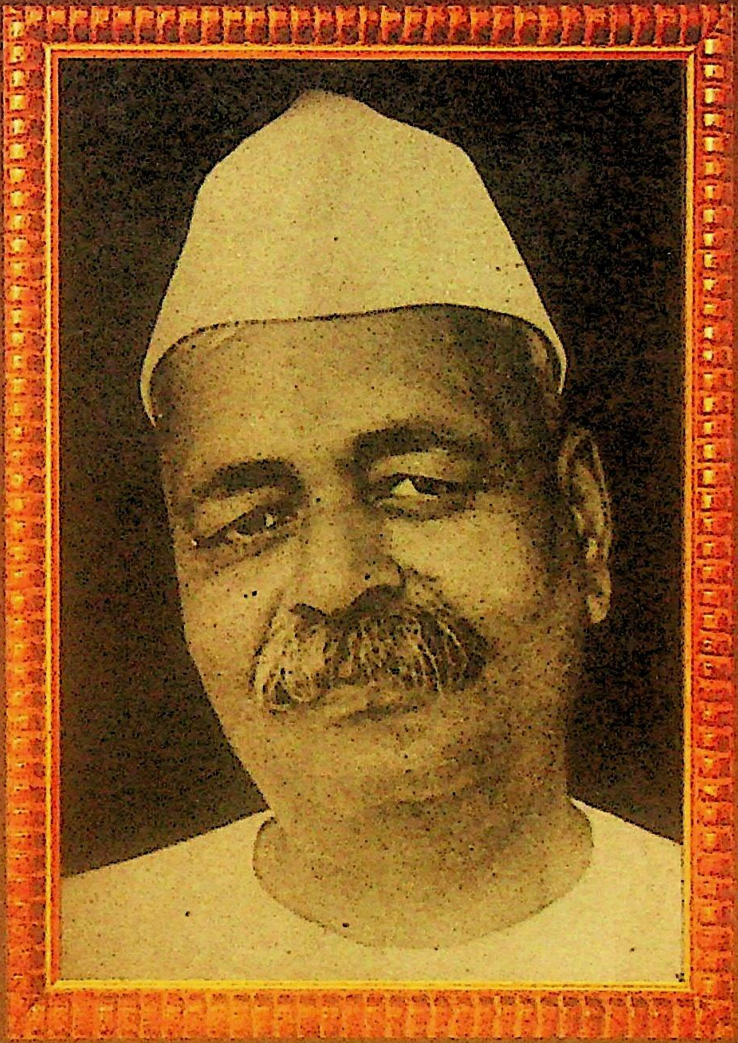
GOVIND BALLABH PANT

Himanshu Joshi



Translation

Indu Bhushan Prasad Sinha

Nehru Bal Pustakalaya

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Preface

To write a biography of Pantji for children was a challenge for me. For it is no mean task to pen a biography in a simple yet lucid style. Although a number of books have been written on this great personality, I felt that the requirements of children are different. That is the reason why I wanted my book to be easy to comprehend, authentic in content and at the same time fascinating for the young reader. Children don't read it merely as a biography but revere it as an authentic historical document. Therefore, to enhance its realistic dimensions, I personally visited all those places which were connected with Pantji's life.

A number of people supported me in this venture. I happened to meet great personalities and scholars, like the poetess Mahadevi Verma, Smt. Vijayalakshmi Pandit, Shri Umashankar Dixit and Shri Kamlapati Tripathi who gave me their free and frank opinions. I troubled Shri Krishnachandra Pant as well as Smt. Ila Pant a number of times. But the project could not have completed without the blessings and unrelenting support of Shri G.L. Bansal, Secretary, Pandit Govind Ballabh Pant Smarak Samiti. Therefore, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all of them.

If children happen to like and appreciate this book I would consider my venture successful.

HIMANSHU JOSHI

Preface

ACROSS THE RIVER KOSI: KHOONT

Snow! Mountains! Greenery! High and low valleys! Sparkling rivers flowing day and night. Snow-clad, shining mountain peaks. Thick forests of pine and deodar! This wonderful paradise-like land that we are looking at is called the Himalayas.

Pandit Govind Ballabh Pant was born in the midst of these Himalayas approximately one hundred and fifteen years ago, on the tenth of September 1887.

Where was he born? Which is the exact place of his birth?

Children, I'm sure you would like to know that!

So, let's first visit the village where Pantji was born. This hilly town, where you are standing now is called Almorah. It was once the capital of the Chand dynasty. Almorah was also considered to be the centre of literary and cultural activities in the central Himalayas.

Now stand on the slopes of Almorah and look—in the distance you can see a deep valley! Over there flows a river that follows a curvaceous, serpentine course. This river is called Kosi. Facing the river are the Syahi Devi Hills and dense forests of pine and *banz*. The Sun temple of Katarmal is also in the same direction. Innumerable step-fields are to be found all around. They appear to have been sketched by expert hands.

There are many houses built with stone everywhere. See how the lime washed walls are shining even from this distance! To the east of all this there is an old village called Khoont. This was the birthplace of Pantji.

So lets first go to and visit Khoont. It will be really enjoyable if we take a jeep, will it not? The jeep will also help us to roam around more easily.

The way zig-zags like a rope and we move ahead. We cover fifteen to twenty kilometres in no time. Then suddenly the jeep stops with a jerk. "This is Khoont," the driver informs us.

An unpaved road, *pucca* houses with rooftops made of sheet of uneven grey-black stones, and clusters of trees.

On one side are the dwellings of Harijans, while on another side are those of Thakur Rajputs. On yet another side are the houses of Brahmins. For centuries these people have been living together like one united family.

"Which house was Pantji born in?" We ask the tea stall owner standing nearby.

"Over there," he responds and points to the fields on the right.

"Over there! There is no dwelling there! There are only paddy fields."

He becomes pensive and replies in a serious tone, "These ruin-like broken walls that you see were once a row of nine houses. No one knows what became of them but the waist-high broken walls remain. Pantji was born there...."

Everyone gazes with surprise. A small *Bedu* plant grows in a crack between two broken walls and nearby

lies the debris of broken stones. "Come on let's go and look. It is close by, just 100-125 metres away."

We move along cautiously on the sides of the furrows so that our feet do not tread on the tender paddy plants. After a few steps we come across broken walls. We see pomegranate bushes, wild cacti and thorny green scorpion plants. Lizards peep through the cracks in the walls. Snakes and scorpions may also lie hidden in these ruins....

We return to the small tea stall and speak to the shopkeeper. "We have heard that an old woman lives here. She is a hundred and six years old."

"She died but there is another woman who is about ninety years old. She lives in the house below—in the lowest house on this slope," he responds.

The slope is a steep one and faces the valley. "Oh, you are scared children? Walk slowly behind me. Do not run or else you may slip and roll down."

The ninety year old woman Tulsi Devi tells us—"There were nine houses in all. The Pant clan lived in these nine houses. Since they were nine in number they were called *naughar* (nine-houses). Now only the remains of one house can be seen. People have carried even the stones of the other houses away. Only the broken walls of the house in which Pantji was born can be seen. Pantji was born there...."

We roam the entire village. The people are proud of the fact that a great personage like Pantji was born in their village. However, it is surprising that after his birth Pantji never came to this village again. Yes, it is

said that he once inaugurated a cooperative society in the nearby village of Dhamas.

An old man relates, "He always showed great feeling for the village. In 1951 when Pantji was the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, he visited Almorah. The inhabitants of Khoont visited him and requested him to open a cooperative dairy in the village. Pantji gave them his full cooperation." The dairy is functioning till date.

When we were about to return we asked the villagers—"Why is this village named Khoont?" They take us to a clear and cool water tank. "The story dates back approximately 250 to 300 years. It is said that a sage visited the village. He bathed in the tank to his heart's content. When he was about to leave, the villagers requested him to bless the stump of a *Morepankhi* tree. This stump was once a great, green tree that had dried-up and the villagers wanted the sage to return it to its former state."

"It is said that the sage recited a few *mantras* (incantations) and sprinkled a few drops of water on the tree. It was transformed and turned green once again."

We do not know how far this folktale is true, but we can see a tree standing firmly next to the tank.

THE PILGRIMS FROM KONKAN

You have seen Khoont and know that Pantji was born there. Now you must be curious to know where his ancestors came from and what they did for their livelihood?

For the answer you have to go hundreds of years back in history. First of all look for the state of Maharashtra in the map of India. Then search for Goa. The area lying on the boundaries of these two states is called Konkan. It is said that Pantji's ancestors were originally the inhabitants of this place. Hundreds of years ago the Solankis ruled Gujarat, Maharashtra was under the Yadavas, and Chauhans ruled Rajasthan. The plains lying between the river Ganga and the river Yamuna were ruled by the Garhwalis while in the east the Chandelas were in power. In south India the Pandyas, Hoysal and Kakatiya dynasties held sway.

Although this great nation of the rivers Ganga, Yamuna, Krishna and Kaveri was divided into several kingdoms, it was united culturally as one nation. There is an incident dating back to that period. A few Brahmins of Konkan decided to go on a pilgrimage and visit sacred places in the Himalayas, namely Badrinath and Kedarnath.

Imagine those days when there were neither roads nor motor vehicles like we have today. There were dense and inaccessible forests on the way and there was constant fear of being attacked by thieves and robbers. The journey of hundreds of miles on foot was truly difficult.

However, the power of faith, belief and devotion cannot be underestimated. One day on the strength of this intense faith a group of devotees started on the pilgrimage. The leader of this group was Pandit Jaidev Pant. Accompanying him were his elder sister and brother-in-law Dinkar Rao, a priest from one of the Konkan temples and a few other close relatives.

The auspicious time calculated astrologically for the departure was ascertained. There was a crowd of people gathered to see them off since it was not known as to when they would return from such an arduous journey. In fact it was uncertain whether they would return at all!

For days and months the pilgrims continued on their path and visited all the holy places on the way. Children, although every particle of soil in India is sacred, the king of all mountains 'the Himalayas', was considered the most important by them. This was the holy land that witnessed the penance of saints and sages and from where the river Bhagirathi emerges. They were so eager to visit the holy land of Shiva and Parvati that they remained unconcerned of the extremes in the climate, whether of heat, cold or rain.

They persevered through the summer, monsoon rains and winter. One whole year passed in the journey and they were still unable to reach their destination. They did not lose hope and continued on their way relentlessly. In the end they found themselves close to Haridwar. They were overcome with joy. They remained in Rishikesh and Haridwar for

several days and took holy dips in the river. Then once again they set out on their journey and this time they were to visit Badrinath Dham.

They came across steep mountains with unpaved pathways. Some of the paths were strewn with rocks and it was fearfully cold. They were not familiar with such shivery cold weather, but they continued step by step with the name of the Lord on their lips. They halted in the end on the stairs of the Badrinath shrine.

They visited Kedarnath and other holy shrines of the Garhwal region after that. Then once again they commenced their journey—this time to Kumaon. The Jageshwar temples of Kumaon were very famous. There were several pilgrim spots in the Gangawali region as well. In those days the Mundkoti kings ruled over Gangawali. They were quite religious minded and held scholars in great esteem.

Pandit Jaidev Pant was a great Sanskrit scholar. He was well versed in astrology also. When he arrived at the court, the King was highly impressed by his knowledge. He invited the group to be his guests at the palace for several days. When they started planning their return to Konkan, the King proposed that they should settle down in his kingdom.

"Leave our home and homeland…!" They exclaimed.

"Why, isn't this land of the Gods yours as well?" Asked the King.

"This land of Lord Shiva's penance! This is heaven itself, but…."

"You will receive all possible assistance and will be accorded the highest respect. You will be the royal

astrologer in the court," persisted the King.

Pandit Jaidev Pant was already mesmerised by the unique beauty of the Himalayas, but could not make up his mind. Meanwhile the King decided to grant him the village of Riwari. After a period, he awarded him the village of Uprada. Pandit Jaidev Pant stayed on and remained there forever.

His family expanded with time and intermingled with the local people to the extent that not only did they adopt the food and dressing habits of the people, they also adopted the customs and language of Kumaon.

In the successive years, many noted astrologers were born in the Pant family. Many renowned physicians were also born. Gumani Pant, the first poet of *Khadi Boli* (Hindi) hailed from Uprada. It is said that when the great poet Gumani died, the famous poet Bhartendu Harishchandra was barely five years old.

Legend has it that in 1865, Raja Rudra Chand, a King of the Chand dynasty moved his capital from Champavat to Almorah. Two years prior to this in 1863, the Chand King had conquered the kingdom of Mankoti. With this, Sor was also brought under their sway.

The Pants were granted great respect in the court of the Chand Kings. Pandit Haridutt Pant was accorded the status of royal poet and awarded the village of Khoont.

The great grandfather of Pantji, Pandit Kamlakant 'Nathu', was no less influential in the King's court. He had commissioned the construction of several large mansions. He lived near Uprada. He had an only son

named Pandit Dhananand Pant.

There is a spot near Bhimtaal called Nau Kuchia Taal, or a pond with nine corners! Here the English had their tea plantations and these were administered by none other than Pandit Dhananand Pant. Slowly the tea plantations suffered losses and the English closed them down. As a result Pandit Dhananand returned to his maternal home at Kunlata.

Pandit Dhananand Pant's second son's name was Manorath Pant. He was born eleven years after the first battle for independence. His childhood was spent in Kunlata. He studied Sanskrit and Hindi at home. He was barely ten years old when his father started preparations for the son's marriage. Those days child-marriages were the norm. He was married with great pomp and splendour to the daughter of the Chief Ameen of Almorah, Pandit Badridutt Joshi.

Joshiji commanded great respect in Almorah. He was highly regarded by the English as well. He asked his son-in-law to come and stay with him. He made him pass the middle school examination and obtained a job for him at the law court.

Astrologers were of the belief that the birth of the baby should not take place at home. Due to this belief, Pandit Manorath Pant sent his wife to Khoont for a few days. Here on 30 August 1887*, on the day of Anant Chaturdashi, the baby Govind was born. His

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* He was born on 30 August 1887 but later Anant Chaturdashi came on 10 September. Since then his birthday was celebrated on 10 September.

mother stayed in Khoont only for 22 days; thereafter she returned to Almorah with the new born.

A DIFFERENT DEMEANOUR

The three storeyed mansion, the large rooms, a prosperous and successful family—this was the maternal grandfather's house. This house became the home of the child Govind also. His grandfather Pandit Badridutt Joshi was a very rich man. He was extremely influential. He commanded a great deal of respect in society. His fame had spread far and wide. His father Pandit Trilochan Joshi was the Dewan (home minister) of the Gurkha rulers. Later on, he became the Chief Ameen.

In the sixteenth century, their ancestor Pandit Raghunath Joshi was awarded village Danya in Chaungrakha district. Since then he was called 'the Joshi from Danya'. He was also in charge of the management of the Jageshwar temples. When the court shifted from Champavat to Almorah, Shri Bharat Joshi was appointed to the post of royal officer. He was called 'Deewan' or minister.

The Joshi descendents continued to be ministers in the courts of King Baj Bahadur Chand, Udhyot Chand and Kalyan Chand among others.

Child Govind learnt a lot under the affectionate shadow of his maternal grandfather and imbibed all his virtues as well. His grandfather was a wise politi-

cian and a good musician. When he sat in his living room, or rather his court, he would first listen to everyone's discourse and then at the very end he would briefly have his say. Govind inherited all these positive qualities.

Grandfather not only earned unlimited wealth, he spent it lavishly as well. The construction of Champa Naula, the Ramje College, Badrishwar temple and the Sanskrit school were all the results of his endeavour.

Govind was different from his companions. He was fair complexioned with large eyes and had a serious demeanour. He had a calm gaze like mature adults. Maybe because of this, other children addressed him as 'Thapua'.

"Can you see the Ramje School of Almorah that is now known as the Ramje College? The building is looking new due to the recent whitewash but it is actually 150 years old!"

From here Govind passed his lower middle school examination with a first division. We now enter the building situated above the Almorah motorway. Here in the living room are displayed portraits of the late Pandit Badridutt Joshi and other elders of the family. This house belonged to Govind's grandfather. Members of his family continue to reside in this house even today. Memories of Govind as a child are etched in every inch of this house. The inhabitants of this house inform us that upstairs in the kitchen, meals for thirty to forty people were cooked at one time. Children who had to reach school on time, sometimes

gulped down half-cooked food and rushed off.

There was heavy snowfall in winter. Children used to make horses and elephants out of snow and play with them. But Govind never played himself. He used to watch this whole scene from a distance.

At that time, children usually wore churidar-pyjamas and on top of these a long coat. Long strings were attached to the coat instead of buttons to help fasten it. One had to cover one's head with a cap because it was believed that a bare head brought bad luck.

Slowly a new awareness dawned upon the nation. There was unrest all around and it was only natural that this would influence Govind.

Although Almorah was only a small mountainous town in one corner of the country, it was always a centre of popular awakening. Since it had been the capital of the Chand dynasty, it was also a centre of political turmoil.

Almorah continued to be the gateway of the Himalayas. It was the land of inspiration for saints and social reformers. Swami Vivekanand first arrived here when he had not taken to wearing saffron robes. At that time his name was Narendranath. He was welcomed once again later when he came on foot from Haldwani to Almorah after staying overnight at Kakri Ghat.

Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore liked this place immensely. It is said that he completed his novel *Nauka Doobi* in Almorah and also wrote some chapters of *Geetanjali* here. His daughter who was suffering

from Tuberculosis passed away in Almorah.

Swami Satyadev Paribrajak and Lala Lajpat Rai contributed to the awakening of nationalism in this town.

Close to Almorah is the revered Mirtola Ashram. Devotees from India and abroad used to meditate and pray here. The German Buddhists monks Lama Govind and Li Gautami stayed at Kasaar Devi for several years.

As a result of this consciousness, in 1871 a newspaper known as 'Almorah Akhbaar' came into existence. Govind used to read it regularly. He would also read 'Bharat Mitr' and 'Bangwasi' as a rule. He received a cultural foundation from these.

In the year 1896, Swami Vivekanand returned from America. That historical trip presented a bright picture of India to the world at large and the Western world in particular was mesmerised. He then came to Almorah and the people welcomed him with great warmth. His inspiring mantra, 'Arise, awake, achieve your goal' began to show its influence even in North India.

Two years later, in 1898 Lord Curzon was appointed as the Governor General of India. While he was an able administrator, he proved to be a tyrant as well. His plan to divide Bengal had created unrest throughout the country.

During this period Swami Satyadev Paribrajak had returned home from America. His fiery speeches were adding fuel to fire. Young Govind was present during his address to the public at the Nanda Devi grounds in Almorah. The speech had a profound effect on his tender mind.

With time, Govind's interests grew wider. Politics, literature, culture—nothing remained untouched. It is true that he was not interested in sports except for his keenness for horse riding with which he continued for a long time.

Children, during that period there were no motor vehicles. People used to travel on foot or on horseback. Every evening Govind used to ride his horse and go towards the Sitoli stream.

UNIQUE GRANDFATHER

Govind's grandfather had great faith in astrology. Once an astrologer read the grandfather's horoscope. He became very serious.

"Why are you silent Panditji?" Asked the grandfather. The astrologer tried to evade answering, so the grandfather put pressure, "Please tell us!"

"What should I say?" Replied the astrologer in a preoccupied manner. "According to this horoscope you will not live much longer.... It is possible that I have made an error of judgement...."

"How can you make a mistake? You are such a great Pandit!" Exclaimed the grandfather. Then after a moment he said, "Alright, examine it once more."

The astrologer examined the horoscope again and arrived at the same conclusion. At last he accepted the offerings and left. The grandfather began sorting out all his affairs. Govind's sacred thread ceremony was

already over, but the grandfather wished to see his small daughter-in-law as well.

Govind was preparing for the seventh standard while his grandfather was anxiously searching for his bride.

Govind's father was then posted in Garhwal. The grandfather did not have sufficient time left to consult him in the matter. He found a bride and married the boy off in haste. Govind was only twelve years old. This was in the year 1899. The astrologer's prediction proved to be true in the same period. Shortly after the wedding, the grandfather fell ill and expired.

The sorrow caused by the grandfather's death was unbearable. No one had as profound an influence over Govind as his grandfather. He imbibed his grandfather's virtues and these made him the man he was to be. At that time he was still a child. One day while playing with his grandmother he looked at a crow perched in the courtyard and asked, "Grandmother why are crows black?"

The grandmother was perplexed. She paused and then answered, "God has chosen to give each form of life a different colour..."

"But grandmother," countered Govind thoughtfully, "cows are also one form of life but they can be either black or white or even brown." After listening to him the grandmother remained speechless.

It is said that children show early signs of intelligence in their character and this was certainly true in Govind's case. Govind was academically sound and brilliant by nature. He was way ahead of his classmates.

Once the class teacher asked the students to write an essay on: 'If I were the Principal.' After checking the copies of children, the teacher kept back one copy and showed it to the principal. The principal, who was an Englishman, was astonished. It is said that he took Govind's suggestions into account and brought them into practice.

Whenever the students quarrelled, Govind acted as the judge. He would listen to both sides of the story and then give a clear verdict. This ability of Govind's proved to be a boon in later years.

You will not come across any other Indian leader who was so sensitive to and yet precise with words. Whenever he spoke, his speech was meaningful and conveyed an earnest message.

After the death of his grandfather Govind became even more solemn than before. He neither talked nor played with anyone. He would quitely sit in solitude for hours together and the consequence was evident in the board examination of the eighth standard. Unlike previous years, this year he was unable to achieve a first division. The result upset Govind even more. However, he started making an effort to come out of this state of mind.

The Sanskrit teacher noticed that Govind would sit idly during his lessons. He did not even hold his text in hand. "Why don't you pay attention to your studies?" The teacher scolded Govind one day. "No sir, I was thinking about something..." Govind stood

up and responded in a humble tone.

"When will you think about what's written in the text?" Asked the teacher.

"I've already thought about that sir..." answered Govind in the same polite way.

"I haven't understood...."

"I read the subject being taught by you today several days ago at home."

"The entire subject?" Asked the teacher in surprise.

"Yes sir."

The teacher asked Govind a few difficult questions from the last chapter of the text. Govind answered all of them correctly. The teacher was astonished.

In the tenth standard examination, Govind succeeded in obtaining the third position in the entire state.

With time Govind's vision became broader. He read several newspapers, journals, and participated in meets and debated on political issues. He had established a children's club from where he became conversant with the art of delivering speeches.

SUCH A SHOCK

December 1904. It was wintertime. The ground and mountains were covered with snow. Govind was fully absorbed in preparation for his examination. He was to give his board examination this year and his future depended on it.

One evening Govind wandered off towards the Sitoli stream. After walking around for a long time when he returned home, he began to feel uneasy. At night he felt extreme pain in the chest.

One Vaidya (Ayurvedic doctor) was called. He checked the pulse and gave some medicine. On being questioned repeatedly by the father, the Vaidya answered in a concerned tone, "It is a heart attack Pantji. But don't worry. It will be cured with treatment." Everyone was shocked.

Only son! And that too just seventeen years old! Such a dangerous disease!

Several Vaidyas and doctors were consulted. He was treated in Moradabad for some time. Slowly he began to recover his health. The twelfth standard examination was close at hand. Govind was insistent. "If I sit for the examination without studying it will hot harm me. It will have no effect on my health. But, yes it will be a good diversion for my mind."

He sat in the examination without any preparation and when the results were declared everyone was amazed. His name was on the merit list.

However Govind was unable to participate in the rejoicing. He knew that he would not be permitted by his family to leave Almorah and go for higher studies. In those days students used to go either to Lucknow or Allahabad to pursue higher studies.

What would happen now? His father did not agree nor did his maternal uncle Lilanand. Several miles away from home, in a hot climate, in the midst of gusts of Loo winds, how would a young Pandit with heart

trouble survive? There would be no proper arrangement for food in such a place.

Govind's determination overruled all objections. His argument was that there were several students from the mountains at Allahabad. He would be in an environment similar to home. If he did not like it there he would return to Almorah on his own.

Allahabad was considered a foreign land in those days. Brilliant students like Hargovind Pant, Taradutt, Purnand Pandey, Prem Ballabh Joshi and others were to accompany him.

It was an era in which untouchability prevailed. Wearing the sacred thread, sporting a braid and eating meals in the kitchen wearing only a loincloth, were considered indispensable. Therefore, a separate kitchen had to be arranged for all the students from the hills.

MANY CONGREGATIONS

All right children, we will now take you towards the college where Govind studied. It is called Muir Central College. It is considered one of the best colleges of Allahabad. What a beautiful building! Look at the blue dome! Let's also look at the rooms where Govind received his education. The same rooms! The building has wings stretched out in both directions and is spread out over a vast area.

Close to the building there is a hostel where Govind stayed. It was known as the MacDonnell Hindu

Hostel in those days but now has been renamed the Malviya Hostel.

Within the four walls there is a very old, two storeyed building. It was constructed in the year 1901. There are 184 rooms and 16 wings. It was among the biggest hostels in the country at one time. Now it looks somewhat deserted despite being home to 350 students.

There are cobwebs in the verandah. In a large room you can see oil paintings of British rulers coated with dust. They are also torn at places. It seems that for decades no one has even bothered to glance at this room.

Come, let us go and find the room where Govind stayed. It was room number 112. We climb the stairs. At present two students from Ballia are staying here.

We peep into the room. Hargovind used to stay here along with Govind. A cook from the mountains also stayed with them in the same room. In this 'mountain-mess' the sanctified cuisine of the hills was prepared.

At that time, the hostel was full of life. Students were fond of music and dance. On holidays the harmonium was played all night long. Thumri, Dadra and other classical compositions were rendered.

Govind's grandfather, Badridutt Joshi was a connoisseur of music. Music sessions were often held in his living room. It was because of this influence that Govind also began to sing classical compositions. Sometimes chess was also played. However studies did not suffer on account of all this.

On doctor's advise, Govind used to stroll up to

the confluence (*Sangam*) every morning and evening. Allahabad was considered the unique converging point for literature, education and politics. Great personalities like Pandit Motilal Nehru, Mahamana Malviya, Pandit Sunderlal, Rajarshi Purshotam Das Tandon and Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru were among the leading lights of Allahabad at that time.

The enlightened political environment gave Govind a sense of direction and vision. Malviyaji used to visit the hostel sometimes. He used to meet the students. He was deeply impressed by Govind's sharp intellect and developed a special affection for him.

Gradually Govind's interest towards literature grew. He read ancient literature along with modern. Govind was overwhelmed when he read *Anand Math* the novel written by the great writer Bankimchandra Chattopadhyaya, who had also penned the magical song 'Vande Mataram'. He searched for all the works of this writer and devoured them.

At the same time Govind developed an interest in writing. Some of his writings were published in 'Saraswati'—the most important Hindi magazine of Allahabad.

Govind had always been keen on maintaining a diary. He used to write in detail about what he had studied, thought about, and the events of the day.

The reception that Lala Lajpat Rai received when he came to Allahabad and what he said in his speech were a part of the lively narrations in his diary.

POLITICAL CONGREGATION AT BENARAS

Although father had sent Govind to Allahabad, he remained anxious. Govind sensed his anxiety and wrote in his very first letter—"You are justified for being anxious but after coming here I am no longer ill. Instead am feeling much healthier. My stay in Allahabad is proving to be a boon..."

That year there was flood in Allahabad. Along with other students, Govind too was involved in helping the victims.

When Govind returned to Almorah in the holidays, it was difficult to recognise him. Instead of the usual pyjamas he was wearing pants and his coat had an English cut. Instead of the usual cap he sported an English haircut. In spite of these external changes, from within he remained sincere and pure.

His health had improved a great deal although he felt a constant heaviness in the head. However he never mentioned this to anyone. He didn't want anyone to worry about him. After the heart trouble, he hardly ever played. Nevertheless, after coming to Allahabad he continued to practice his swimming in the confluence.

When Govind returned from holidays, he told his fast friend Hargovind, "This year the Congress party will have a conference in Benaras. Should we also go for it?"

"How, in what capacity?" Asked Hargovind.

"It does not matter in what capacity. We can

always become volunteers." Hargovind gave his consent.

Benaras was not far from Allahabad. The rail fare was also not much. One day the two of them set out to witness the 'political congregation'. It was in the winter of 1905. They were enthusiastic and hopeful, with new dreams. This was their first visit to Benaras and the first Congress conference. Gopal Krishna Gokhale was to preside over the conference. Mahatma Gandhi used to consider him his political guru.

With the advent of such great leaders, Benaras was bustling with activity. The streets were decorated and arches were erected all over. The opening address by Gokhale was very meaningful. People listened with rapt attention. Govind was extremely impressed by his eloquence and his profound and solemn thoughts. He felt such a deep respect for Gokhale that he began to consider him his mentor.

THE GOLD MEDAL...

The grand Kumbh Mela was scheduled to be held in Prayag the next year. This had religious significance. Devotees from every corner of the country were to visit the Kumbh. Congress decided to send several volunteers to this fair. They were to help the travellers and spread nationalistic feelings amongst them.

Counters to recruit volunteers were set up at various places. Govind also participated in this fair as a

volunteer. He gave a fiery speech there asking the British to quit India.

On returning to the hostel, he found out that Principal Jennings was furious. He was unable to bear the fact that his favourite and most brilliant student was taking 'this path'.

Next day was Sunday. The hostel peon came to inform Govind that the Principal wanted to see him immediately.

"I have been informed by the hostel warden that you went to the Kumbh Mela. You distributed pamphlets and promoted the Congress. You also gave a speech against the government...!" Said the Principal in anger. "I have heard that you also went to Benaras to participate in the 'Congress Convention'. The students come here to learn discipline, not to break it," continued the Principal after a pause. Govind remained silent.

"Do you think you did the right thing...?"

"Sir, I do not find anything wrong with it. I have done my duty," replied Govind. The Principal stared in anger.

"Alright, you can leave. You did your duty and now it is my turn to do mine." Stated the Principal. Govind calmly went away.

Everyone was familiar with the Principal's temperament. The atmosphere was heated. Next day a new rule was displayed on the college notice board. "Those students who visited the Kumbh Mela and broke the discipline of the college will not be permitted to sit for the examinations."

Not even three weeks had passed when an

anxious letter arrived from his maternal uncle. The hostel in which Govind resided had been commissioned by the efforts of Malviyaji. The students revered him. He tried to explain to the Principal that one complete year of the students would go waste. The Principal, however, was stubborn and did not agree. In the end when Malviyaji threatened to take the matter to the High Court, he became nervous. He finally had to surrender and gave his permission.

Later Govind decided to study law. In Law College many great lawyers like Dr. Kailash Nath Katju, Acharya Narendra Dev, Pandit Hargovind Pant, Fazal Ali were his classmates.

In 1909 Govind gave his law examination and came first. He also received the 'Lums den' gold medal.

A NEW LIFE

Four years later when he returned home from Allahabad, Pantji found everything somewhat transformed. He was enthusiastic but at the same time he felt a deep sense of melancholy.

When Pantji was studying in Allahabad, a son was born to him on the first of February 1908. But, before the end of the year he lost his son. Some time later his wife also expired. Pantji was only twenty-three years old then. To get over this loss, Pantji found solace in books. He increased his political activities and decided to begin practicing law. The issue that confronted him

was—where to begin his practice?

His friend Pandit Hargovind Pant had made a place for himself at Ranikhet. Almorah was lagging behind. The strong influence of his maternal grandfather's towering personality was still prominent. He also had personal contacts and acquaintances. He therefore, decided to establish his practice in this town.

His maternal uncle ascertained an auspicious time for him and applied red vermilion on his forehead and sent him to the court. When Pantji was proceeding in his black coat, he felt a sting of tears in his eyes. If grandfather were alive, he would have been so happy today!

The first day turned out to be very auspicious. Although, he was with a well-known lawyer and did not have much opportunity to speak, still the English judge was very impressed with his unchallenged arguments.

When Pantji began practice, he took two vows. The first was that he would not take up any false case and the second was that he would not argue a case in court unless he had studied it in depth. He was to be benefited immensely from both these vows later on.

Pantji was soft spoken but at the same time a self-respecting personality. He never accepted any personal slights. In those days, there was an English judge in the Almorah court. He was very crude and arrogant. He was jealous of Pantji's brilliance. He could not bear the fact that a novice lawyer could speak with such authority. There would often be scornful remarks till one day when things really got out of hand and the judge angrily claimed, "I will not allow

you to come to court from tomorrow."

Pantji was not able to swallow this insult. He replied back in an equally angry tone, "I will not even set my foot in this court from tomorrow," and he left the court in rage.

Govind actually never set foot in the Almorah court ever again. He practiced in the Ranikhet court for sometime and then turned to Kashipur.

As a lawyer, Kashipur became the main centre of his activities. Today Kashipur is an upcoming hill town. There are factories all around and the land of the foothills is also fertile. It is one of the main hubs of business and has many important aspects. However in those days it was less noisy and not so densely populated.

After passing several streets of Kashipur we arrive at an old house. The house is called—'Namakwalon ki Kothi.' Pantji stayed here for the initial one year or so.

How must this bungalow have seemed hundred years ago? What was the atmosphere like?

In the meanwhile, Pantji was remarried. He used to stay with his parents, wife, sister and brother-in-law. All in one joint family. For the first time in his life he got an opportunity to live together with his family members.

He also lived in the Khalsa colony for some time but stayed for the longest period in the Lahorian colony. The bungalow in the Lahorian colony is on the

right of the street, two storeyed, and a red letterbox hangs outside.

Pantji began a new life in Kashipur. Besides fame, he also accumulated wealth. He got his first case in Kashipur for which he received a fee of only five rupees. However his earnings kept increasing with time.

Pantji was compassionate and always ready to give a helping hand to the poor and needy. He became very popular in no time. He had enjoyed peace for only a short period in Kashipur when his father became ill. His father died of cholera the next day. He was only forty-four years old when father passed away. Thereafter, Pantji had to shoulder the responsibility of the entire family.

The British ruled over India in those days. The British lived in great style. The capital of the country used to shift from Delhi to Shimla during summer those days and in the same manner the summer capital of United Province (now Uttar Pradesh) used to shift from Lucknow to Nainital. Therefore, the Kashipur court used to shift to Nainital in the beginning of summer and return to Kashipur for six months during winter. In this fashion Pantji was attached to both Nainital and Kashipur. And his sphere of work expanded.

Pantji took special interest in politics while residing at Kashipur. He began to inspire the youth. He was interested in literature from the beginning and with this in mind, he started a 'Prem Sabha' in Kashipur.

We go and visit the building in Khalsa colony where even today a small wooden board hangs with

the words 'Prem Sabha' inscribed on it. In the Kashipur district, this institution played a very significant role in creating awareness among the common people.

When Pantji arrived in this area, it was extremely backward in terms of education. With his efforts, several new projects came up. He inaugurated 'Udaybir Raj Hindu High School.' The British did not want the school to be a successful institution. They created obstacles. They gave the teachers several temptations to prevent them from teaching. However, after some unsuccessful attempts, they finally banned the institution. They declared the school to be associated with anti-government elements and levied a fine of two thousand and five hundred rupees on it. They passed an order that if the fine amount was not paid by a certain date the hostel would be put up for auction.

Pantji was furious. He organised a conference in which he vowed that till the time two thousand and five hundred rupees were not collected he would not take food or water. The workers spread out sheets in the streets to collect contributions. There was chaos all around. The rich and poor, coolie and labourer, each one of them contributed according to their capacity. Morning passed into evening and the evening passed, until at midnight the entire amount was collected. A wave of joy passed through the crowd. The night echoed with loud cheers for Pantji.

Malviyaji had taught Pantji the importance of education. We are sitting in the college verandah. We are looking at a sixty four year old register. We are turning the yellow pages and reading the proposal written in Pantji's handwriting—

> 'Education should be made free in Kashipur schools. Not only this but also education should be made compulsory for children.'

At the end of the proposal you can see Pantji's signature and the date—16 March 1923.

At that time Pantji was a member of Kashipur's notified area. The administration of education was under him. He was the first person in the country to make education free and compulsory.

DARK SHADOWS AND THEN DAWN

In Kashipur, Pantji enjoyed a great deal of success but he also had his fair share of tragedy. After the death of his father he lost his little more than one year old son to an ordinary ailment. Then, at the same time he lost his wife. His sister and brother-in-law used to live with him. Suddenly the brother-in-law expired.

His mother was crushed by the weight of these tragedies and she now spent most of her time in prayer. She was unable to bear the sorrow of her widower son and widow daughter.

What would happen next? This was the difficult

question in front of her. These sorrowful events turned Pantji into a detached person. He spent most of his time in fighting cases or in social or political activities. His home had become more of a night shelter.

The pressure of relatives with proposals and well-wishers started increasing gradually. Pantji was not prepared to remarry because he wanted freedom from household responsibilities.

But he was unable to see his mother so unhappy. In the end he had to bow to her wishes. The marriage was a very simple affair. The marriage procession went from Pantji's house to another house nearby.

We will now take a look at that house which is presently in a dilapidated condition and over which the tenants have kept their control.

Pantji was thirty years old then. He was always careless about his own health. He ate whatever food he was provided with. He wore clothes unmindfully.

He returned home late from the courts. He used to get stuck en route. Everyone at home would sit and wait for him to return. Among those waiting, there would be clients, social and political workers, leaders and students. He would eat very late. Then he would go out for a stroll. He used to chew betel leaves with tobacco.

When he returned home he would invariably read a good book before bedtime. He would sleep late and wake up late in the mornings.

With time his fame grew. Wealth poured in. People advised him to practice in the Allahabad High Court. Those days Pandit Motilal Nehru and Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru were the leading lawyers there. However, Pantji did not agree to make the move.

After some time, along with Kashipur he also started living in Nainital. He bought a new house in the Naya Bazaar of Tallitaal. It gradually became the centre of political activities.

Over here Pantji made the plan for a 'Kumaon Parishad'—an institution that would help resolve the problems of the hilly areas. This institution was formed in 1916 and it performed many tasks of historical importance. Those days the main problems faced by the Kumaon region were forced labour, illiteracy, poverty, exploitation of the landless and forests.

The British rulers made poor people work without pay. They used to extract work like coolies but gave them nothing in return. Under the leadership of Pandit Badridutt Pandey, a movement took place to fight this exploitation. Finally, at the Bageshwar fair, everyone took a vow to die rather than succumb to such ugly practice. Consequently, the poor people of Kumaon were freed from this curse forever.

The 'Almorah Newspaper' had a major contribution to make towards this awakening of the common man. It was one of the oldest Hindi newspapers. The English banned it and with it they blew out a burning torch.

Pantji, Pandit Badridutt Pandey and others were unhappy about this. However, they did not give up and made a new plan.

It was in the year 1918, the day of Deepavali that a new lamp glowed and this was called 'Shakti'. 'Shakti' is being published uninterrupted till this very day. Pantji was the invaluable force behind 'Shakti.'

GANDHIJI'S 'GANDHI CAP'

The year 1916 was a special year for Pantji. This year the Congress had its conference in Lucknow and he was invited to represent the Kumaon region.

Lokmanya Tilak was released from jail and he came directly to Lucknow to attend the conference. He got a warm reception at the Char Bagh station. Tilak was covered with flower garlands from top to toe.

At this conference for the first time, Pantji had an opportunity to meet the father of the nation Mahatma Gandhi and the nightingale of India Sarojini Naidu.

Sarojini Naidu delivered a satirical speech that influenced him a lot. In the speech she said—

"Sisters, brothers and the unarmed citizens of India...!"

Whereas the British government was enraged with this speech.

Two years later, the 'Montague Chelmsford' report was prepared. As soon as it was published in the month of June 1918, it seemed as though the whole nation was caught up in a storm.



Young Govind
with his father



Student Govind



Nehruji and Pantji engrossed in a discussion



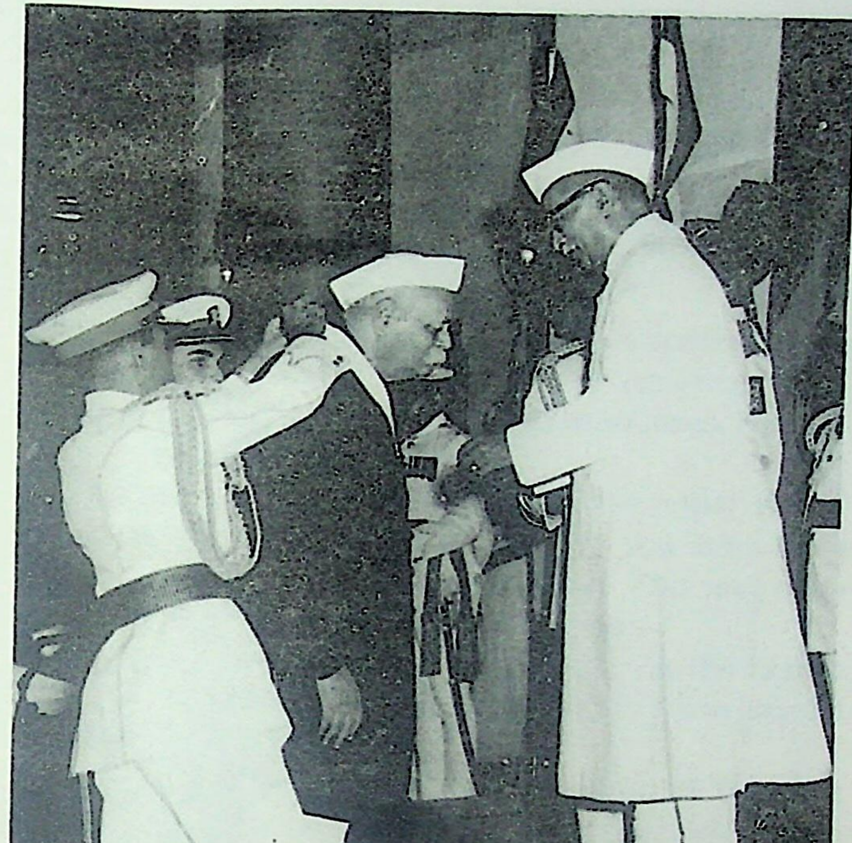
Pantji with his wife (right) and Ila Pant (left)



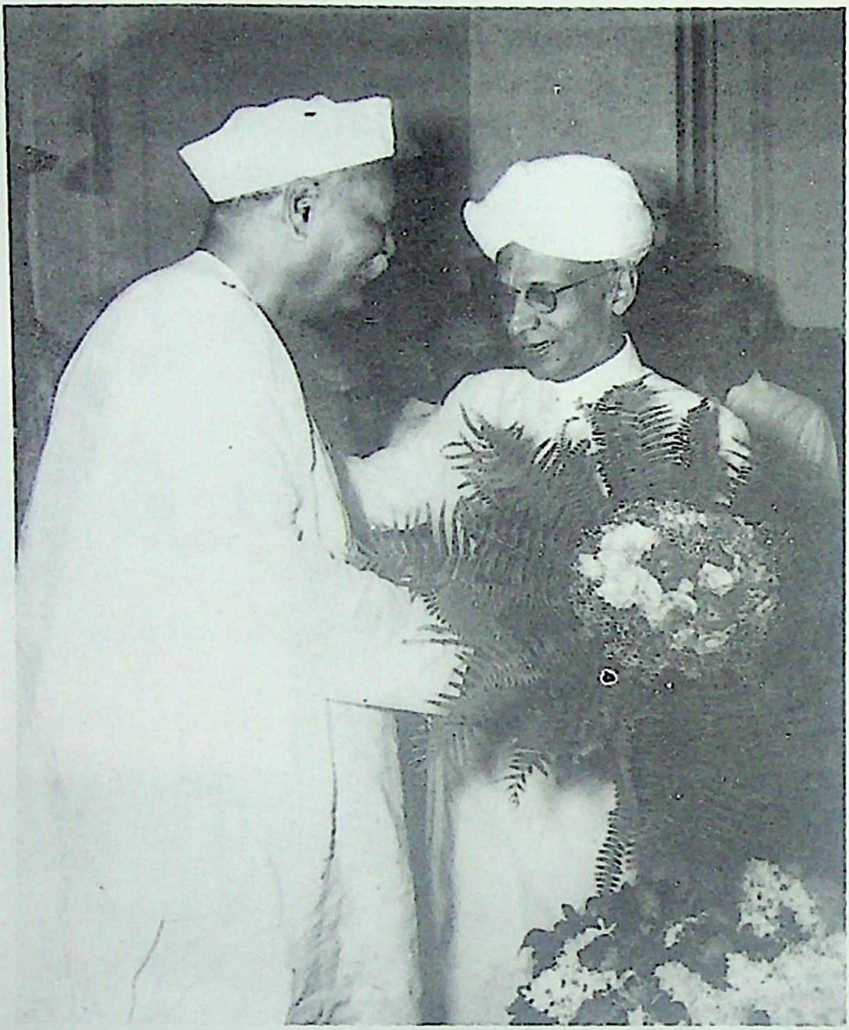
Sardar Patel, Pantji and Purshotam Das Tandon



Nehruji and Indiraji at Pantji's family function



Dr. Rajendra Prasad conferring Bharat Ratna on Pantji



Pantji with President Dr. Radhakrishnan

The committee had done the greatest injustice to the Kumaon region. It was left out of the necessary reforms. It was declared a backward area and insulted on purpose. Pantji staunchly opposed this. Due to his efforts the Kumaon region was given the right to send its representative to the state assembly.

In December 1921, the Congress held its conference in Ahmedabad. After the conference in Benaras, Pantji participated in all the succeeding conferences. He was present in this conference as well.

Children, you must have seen the white Khadi cap, which is called the 'Gandhi cap'. You must have seen several leaders wearing this cap. This was once considered to be a symbol of patriotism.

In this historical session, Gandhiji was the first to wear this historical cap and then onwards it was named after him.

In this session, Gandhiji vowed that till the time the 360 million Indians did not get proper clothes to wear, he would wear only a loincloth and an ordinary sheet on top to cover his body. He maintained this vow all his life. In all kinds of weather be it cold, hot or rainy, he wore only these clothes. He dressed in them even in a cold country like England.

This was the 36th session of the Congress. On the banks of the clean Sabarmati river a white Khadi tent was erected. On the entrance to the tent was written—'Independence is our birthright'. This was Lokmanya Tilak's slogan. He had died one year ago in Bombay (now Mumbai). Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel was the

chairman of the reception committee. He read out his speech in Hindi. The presidential address was also read out in Hindi.

Pantji was deeply moved by the atmosphere there. He decided to devote himself fully to serving the nation. After returning from here, he got immersed in promoting communal harmony, eradicating untouchability and promoting Khadi (homespun cloth).

AFTER KAKORI

With time the sphere of Pantji's activities continued to widen. He did not confine himself to the politics of the region any longer. He was considered to be one of the important national leaders.

The first of January 1923 will remain an unforgettable day in the history of the Congress party. On this day, Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das and Pandit Motilal Nehru started a new party called Swarajya Party within the Congress fold. Pantji played a major role in drafting the constitution. He became one of the foremost leaders of the Swarajya Party.

Children you must have heard about 'Kakori Kand'. This was a case that shook the British Empire. It was the evening of 9 August 1925. The sky was overcast with clouds. A train was blowing its whistle in the passing. As the train neared Kakori someone pulled the chain and the train came to a halt all of a sudden. Revolutionary patriots had planned this in advance.

They looted the treasure being carried on the train within half an hour.

Twenty-eight of them were caught. Pantji fought the case on behalf of the revolutionaries. Nevertheless, on 6 April 1927 the British government gave its verdict which read as—

> Pandit Ram Prasad Bismil, Ashfaq, Rajendranath Lahidi and Roshan Lal were to be sentenced to death. Sachindranath Sanyal was awarded life imprisonment while Manmath Nath Gupta was sentenced to fourteen years' imprisonment.

When we questioned the aged revolutionary Manmath Nath Gupta about the case, he told us that—

> "Pantji helped us a lot in every possible way. He kept our morale high and left no stone unturned to assist us till the very end.... Very few people are aware of the fact that Munshi Premchand used to watch the court proceedings clandestinely. He was my guru. He used to teach me Geography...."

After sometime the Simon Commission arrived in India and it was opposed throughout the length and breadth of the country. Punjab Kesari Lala Lajpat Rai became a martyr when the police wounded him during a 'lathi charge'. His martyrdom added fuel to the fire of protests raging in the country.

In Lucknow, Pandit Jawarharlal and Pantji were preparing to take out a procession. On 29 and 30 November 1928 there were mass demonstrations in Lucknow. In the protests of 29 November, thousands

of demonstrators were present. People were shouting slogans. A mounted white police officer dealt several blows on Pandit Nehru with his 'lathi'. While trying to protect him, Pantji was injured severely on his head and shoulders. The wounds were so severe that Pantji suffered the consequences throughout his life. Relating this event, Nehruji wrote in his autobiography—

> "My body was covered with wounds and bruises and it was fortunate that the injuries were not received on any delicate organ. However our companions were covered with blood. The six feet tall Govind Ballabh Pant proved to be an easy target for the police. The wounds received at that time gave birth to such a deadly and painful disease that he could not be rid of it all his life....."

This incident brought Pantji and Nehruji even closer. So much that they developed a strong bond that was to be a lifelong one.

A JOURNEY TO THE HIMALAYAS

The news that Gandhiji was visiting Nainital, Almorah and Kausani spread a wave of joy throughout the hilly region. Pantji was credited for inviting him here. The itinerary was finalised. Preparations to welcome him were underway at several places. Despite his poor health, Pantji was supervising all the preparations personally. Where would Gandhiji stay? What would he eat? What would he wear? What would he sleep on?

Pantji was planning all the details, working on them day and night.

He got the porridge for Gandhiji roasted in front of him. He had a quilt stitched up with homespun thread. The room where Gandhiji was to spend the night was white washed once again. The stones in the stairs had not been set properly. They were removed and rearranged properly.

Gandhiji was not alone during this trip to the Himalayas. There was a long procession of people. Gandhiji's youngest son Devdas Gandhi was also present. Jawaharlal Nehru, Acharya Kripalani and Gandhiji's personal assistant Pyare Lal Nayyar were all present.

On 13 June 1929, Gandhiji and his group arrived in Bareilly from Sabarmati by train. The next day he was in Haldwani. He was to leave Haldwani at night and stay in Takula. This hilly place is located between Haldwani and Nainital.

At night Gandhiji rested here. In the morning there was a big crowd of followers to see him. Some brought fruits while others brought flowers. But Gandhiji accepted only garlands made from homespun yarn.

In the morning, the procession progressed towards Nainital on foot. Hundreds of people followed him—the old, the young, and even children. They were all amazed to see that the sixty-year old Gandhiji was able to walk faster than a youngster.

Arches had been erected at several places along

the way. Streets were decorated with flowers. The sky reverberated with cheers for Gandhiji. As far as the eye could see only heads were visible.

The English governor exclaimed in astonishment, "I have never seen such a long procession in my life."

Gandhiji gave a very touching speech that left everyone spellbound. In the end, when he requested people for donations, money poured in from all directions. Many women contributed by offering their ornaments as well. Bapu kept distributing all the funds to help the poor people of that area.

Gandhiji's next stopover was Tadikhet. He stayed in 'Prem Vidhyalaya' for one night. Then he moved on to Almorah. A sea of people converged there as well.

Gandhiji visited Bageshwar and the sacred bank of the Surya River where with the untiring efforts of Pantji, Badridutt Pandeyji and others, the tradition of 'forced coolie labour' had been curbed forever.

The stay at Kausani made Gandhiji's tour of the Himalayas an unforgettable experience. When Bapu reached Kausani from Almorah it was already evening.

The glittering golden peaks of the Himalayas, the green valleys, the mountain ranges touching the sky and the incomparable land of the hermits enchanted Bapu. He wrote the commentary to the 'Anashakti Yoga' while stationed in this peaceful land for a few days.

Kausani was linked to the Geeta and Gandhiji, and became immortal. Pantji walked behind Gandhiji like his shadow throughout the tour.

When Bapu went to Kashipur from Kausani, he paused at Bhawali for a while. When Pantji mentioned that he wanted to plant fruit orchards in that area, Gandhiji said, "Every inch of land should be utilised well. When trees are cut down, a greater number of trees should be planted in their place. For the poor a fruit tree will be more useful than a cow."

THE FIRST PILGRIMAGE

Although Pantji was a successful politician he never went to jail until the Salt Movement began.

Bapu had planned his 'Dandi March' for 6 April 1930. His goal was to march up to the seashore and make salt. Making salt was against the law. A few chosen 'Satyagrahis' had been invited from all over India to participate in this historical event. From the Kumaon only one Satyagrahi was chosen—namely Pandit Jyotiram Kandpal.

Pantji was in Nainital at that time. He declared that on 25 May he too would make salt and break the law. He was imprisoned for a period of six months even before he could make salt.

Pantji had been unwell for a long time. His backache, that started during childhood began to trouble him. The consequences of the lathi charge during the Simon Commission days added to the pain. The suffering had become so unbearable a year before that he was admitted to the Lucknow Medical College for

treatment. His health improved somewhat but then his earlier health problems resurfaced.

During his arrest, he was placed on a stretcher and put inside a vehicle and sent to Dehradun for the entire duration of his imprisonment. He was in Dehradun for a few days only when he was shifted to the Bareilly Central Jail. The weather was stiflingly hot and to this were added the poor conditions in the jail. Somehow six months passed by.

Even after he returned from jail there was no respite! He stayed in Haldwani and remained occupied with organisational work. Then he went to Nainital, where in 1928 he was elected chairman of the Nainital District Board.

Life in Nainital was hectic. In the hope of some solitude Pantji bought an orchard in Bhawali. There was a small bungalow in the midst and he retreated to it whenever he felt exhausted. This bungalow proved to be very lucky for Pantji. Here on 10 August 1931 a son was born to him. The infant was named Raja alias Krishna Chandra Pant. He is today one of the most respectable and brilliant leaders of the country.

THAT FLIGHT

In November 1934, Pantji was elected unopposed to the Central Legislative Assembly. In this manner he was connected to Delhi.

It was the winter-time of 3 February 1936. The

excessive cold weather at night in Delhi had led to the formation of a fog in the morning. In the afternoon the bright sunshine cleared the atmosphere. Pantji had to travel by air for the first time. He was quite anxious. The plane was a small one. Pantji was going from Delhi to Haldwani and was accompanied by his personal assistant.

Pantji has described this interesting and thrilling journey in his own words—

> "Yesterday we travelled by plane to Haldwani and today we have to return to Delhi once again. It was a very comfortable journey. Peaceful. When we took off, there was some fear lurking in my mind. We experienced a few jerks as well, but in a few moments everything became normal. We did not feel any movement in particular. The plane raced ahead smoothly through the air. It was a pleasure to watch the ever-changing natural scenery below.
>
> Swimming in the sky is an experience by itself. We covered a distance of 152 miles in an hour and a half. We did not even realise how we managed it so fast....!"

NEW CHALLENGES, NEW ISSUES

The year 1937 proved to be a very significant one in the history of India. The Congress party formed provincial governments in several provinces. It had

received a clear majority in Madras Presidency, United Province (now Uttar Pradesh), Bihar, Orissa and so on. In the United Province Pantji had lived successfully.

On 17 July, he became the Chief Minister. Although his term in office was short, nevertheless he managed to do a lot of significant work. His council of ministers constituted several brilliant leaders like Kailash Nath Katju, Rafi Ahmad Kidwai, Hafiz Mohammad Ibrahim and Smt. Vijayalakshmi Pandit.

Pantji used to look after his colleagues and companions like an elder in a family and shared their joys and sorrows. Smt. Vijayalakshmi recalls those days and relates—

> "Pantji was like my elder brother. When I became a minister in his cabinet he said, 'How will you live alone in Lucknow? You will have to stay in my bungalow.' He was an elder with old-fashioned ideas. How can a girl live alone! Therefore I stayed in his bungalow. He was very particular about looking after my smallest details. His wife used to come to me every morning and ask, 'What would you like to eat today?'"

During his short tenure he accomplished a great deal. He made a law to free poor farmers from the exploitation of landowners. He finally put an end to enforced labour. The population of United Province was only 50 millions at that time. Of this, only 4 million were literate. Pantji formulated new policies to disseminate

education. He started new projects for Harijans.

His bungalow was always crowded with people seeking help. Someone was looking for a job; another required financial assistance for medical treatment, while still another was asking for justice. Pantji's doors were open for everyone.

Years ago when he was a practicing lawyer, he had assisted several students during their education. However when his political activities widened and he had to leave his practice he continued to help with his remaining income. When this became inadequate he sold off his bungalow in Nau Kuchia Taal.

On 22 March 1939, there was a Congress session in Tripuri. In one way a historical session. The principles of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose were clashing with those of Mahatma Gandhi. There were also differences of opinion. Pantji came forward to speak in favour of Gandhiji. With his indisputable arguments the atmosphere changed in favour of Gandhiji. In this way Netaji had to face defeat.

On 30 September 1939, the Second World War flared up and fierce wars began to be fought. On 22 October, the Congress Working Committee called for a meeting in which Gandhiji declared that the Congress would not back the British in the war. The Congress would adopt a non-cooperative stance at every level. It was also decided that all the Congress led governments in the provinces would tender their resignations.

Before resigning from the cabinet, Pantji gave a very touching speech in the assembly. On the evening of 30 October he submitted his resignation letter to the

Governor. At that time Pandit Nehru and Maulana Azad were also present in Lucknow.

After Pantji tendered his resignation and returned to the bungalow, Nehruji, Maulana Azad, Kailash Nath Katju, Rafi Sahib, Sampurnanandji and others were impatiently waiting for him.

"How was it...?" They asked.

Laughing Pantji answered. "It was the way you wanted." Everyone laughed together.

Pantji returned to Nainital from Lucknow and began to plan for future.

Although Pantji was considered to be one of the prominent leaders of the nation, after the Congress session at Tripuri, his importance grew further.

In the session at Ramgarh also Pantji's contribution was great. It was decided that apart from complete non-cooperation, no other alternative could be more effective to deal with the foreign power.

Acharya Vinoba Bhave launched the individual Satyagraha movement. He was imprisoned for three months. Nehruji and Sardar Patel were also held captive. On 24 November, Pantji was arrested in Nainital. He got jailed for one year.

Pantji was in the Almorah jail. It was an old, fortress like jail. The walls were made of cement and the floor was cold. Pantji remained imprisoned in this suffocating and damp environment from 28 November 1940 to 11 October 1941.

In 1934-35, for approximately one year, Nehruji had to stay here. In the year 1936, for two months, the

Frontier Gandhi, and in 1945 for a few days, Acharya Narendra Dev, were also imprisoned here.

Since the prison was not very far from Nainital, the children could visit their father during holidays.

MEMORIES OF AHMADNAGAR

Pantji had hardly left the Almorah jail when the siren sounded once again. This time the uprising was decisive.

The flames of the Second World War were spreading far and wide. Europe was being destroyed. Japan had passed through Malaysia and Singapore and arrived at the border of Burma. With the help of Japan, Netaji was planning to enter Manipur with his 'Azad Hind Fauj' (Indian National Army).

In Bombay (now Mumbai) there was an important meeting of the Working Committee. All the great leaders had been invited.

On the night of 2 August, Pantji left for Bombay. There was a manmoth crowd at the Haldwani railway station. Thousands of people had gathered to see off Pantji.

On 9 August in Bombay, a historical meeting was held. Gandhiji was in favour of a decisive battle this time. He gave the call for the 'Quit India' movement and took a vow to either 'do or die.'

It shook British imperialism at the roots. Arrests of all national leaders began during the night itself.

Gandhiji, Nehruji, Pantji, Sardar Patel, Acharya Kripalani were all arrested.

Gandhiji along with Ba and Sarojini Naidu were imprisoned in the Aga Khan Palace in Puna (now Pune), while everyone else was held captive in the Ahmadnagar fort jail.

Children you must have heard stories about the brave deeds of Chand Bibi. It is said that she too was imprisoned in this jail.

Each one was given a barrack like room. Outside the barracks and within the four walls there was a lot of uneven arid land. Nehruji gave a suggestion, "Who knows how long we might have to stay here. Why don't we make flower beds in this arid land and cultivate some flowering plants?"

Pantji, Acharya Kripalani and Shankar Rao Dev and others evened out the ground. They cleared all the bushes and weeds and planted flowers. Pantji used to get up every morning and water the plants. Asaf Ali used to help him. Sardar Patel was responsible for the kitchen. His discipline was remarkable.

In a short time, there was greenery all around. Colourful flowers gave out their fragrance. They had created a new world.

Maulana Azad and Nehruji used to spend most of their time in reading and writing. Pantji too was keen on reading. He used to make notes on his books. In his entire life Pantji never found as much solitude to do his reading as here.

Pantji used to spend some time playing badminton as well. Although he had a heavy built, he was considered to be a good badminton player.

His temperament was sober and solemn like the ocean but he always looked cheerful. He had affection for everyone. In his autobiography Nehruji has pointed out—

> "The closer I grew to him the more was I influenced by the depth of his thoughts. His tolerance and his sense of responsibility were unmatched. His solemn personality left an indelible imprint on my mind."

Pantji used to write affectionate letters to his children from jail sometimes. He wrote the following letter to his son Raja on 5 December 1942.

Dear Raja,

I was pleasantly surprised to receive your letter. I felt very happy. For this same happiness I am waiting for your holidays.

The examinations are approaching very fast and therefore you must be short of time. In spite of that you have sent a letter so early, making it all the more joyful.

I hope that you are not worrying about your examinations. I am fully confident of the fact that you will be successful and that you will achieve much more than success. I have written to you several times that when you perform a task with a calm mind and concentration, it is bound to bring success.

I am happy that you possess these qualities. These shall benefit you in the present as well as the future. I am sure that the suggestions that I gave you in my last letter would have proved to be useful.

The examinations should have ended by now so that you can spend your precious holidays enjoying yourself.

Always work hard. Remain cheerful. Keep yourself happy. We should never be unhappy. You can never gain from despair, and depression is never of any use. The person who is happy with himself can perform every task well. He finds pleasure in his work. All his companions also appreciate him.

To tell you the truth cheerfulness is a very big virtue. It is a boon. A cheerful person spreads happiness wherever he goes. A good temperament and good health are very closely related. When someone obtains one of the two, then the other follows on its own. Therefore keep your morale high. Do well and think positively. Whenever you plan for your holidays keep these points in mind.

With lots of blessings,

Babu

Pantji used to send his children similar letters from Almorah jail.

His health was failing him gradually. Therefore, he was sent from Ahmadnagar jail to Bareilly Central Jail. He was released from there on 31 March 1945.

PARTITION AND DEVELOPMENT

On the one hand efforts were on to obtain independence, while on the other hand communal violence. The Muslim League was bent on unleashing violence. It declared 16 August 1946 as the 'Direct Action Day' and this provoked violence that engulfed the entire country. Ten thousand people were killed in Calcutta (now Kolkata) alone.

Gandhiji went to Noakhali to stop this violence. In the end, the All India Congress Committee gave in and agreed to the partition in principle.

This was the most unfortunate moment in the history of the nation. Jinnah's dream of creating Pakistan was being realised. The country was being divided into two. With a heavy heart Pantji had presented the proposal for partition and Nehruji and Sardar Patel seconded the proposal.

Gandhiji was not present in the meeting where this decision was made. He was returning from Noakhali. He was given this sad news at the Patna station.

A united India was being divided!

Pantji was present when on 15 August at midnight the tricolour was hoisted at India Gate.

New governments were being formed at the Centre and in the states. Pantji became the first Chief Minister of the United Provinces in an independent India. In the last elections he had received 96% votes, which was a record in itself.

The cabinet was almost the same as that set up in 1937.

The English left behind a mountain of problems. There was scarcity of food grains. There was drought in the country. There had been devastation due to the riots. The English did not leave anything for the country to rely upon. To make matters worse, Kashmir was attacked and the tribes were used as a cover-up.

There were problems but along with the problems the country had visionary leaders to solve them. Pantji's leadership proved to be a boon for the state.

He had left Nainital and moved to Lucknow on a permanent basis. He held the reins of the state from 15 August 1947 upto 1 December 1954. He lived in a big and grand bungalow on Kalidas Marg.

We enter the building and look at the rooms where Pantji's memories are alive even today.

After Pantji went to Delhi, this building became a state guest-house but now once again has become the Chief Minister's residence.

Pantji had renamed the United Provinces and called it Uttar Pradesh. As Chief Minister he executed many tasks that have a historical significance. He abolished the practice of bonded labour and prevented landowners from exploiting the landless farmers. He gave special attention to education. The province was foremost in abolishing the practice of untouchability. He started new projects for economic development. He started the industrial revolution in the state. The cooperative movement also flourished and the farmers' revolution was given a boost.

In the opinion of political experts, the progress

seen by the state under the aegis of Pantji was never possible in later days. Due to Pantji's efforts, Uttar Pradesh emerged with a fresh image on the map of the nation.

The treasury benches and the opposition both held Pantji in great esteem. He was not only the Chief Minister of the state but also an elder and respected by one and all. He nominated the noted poetess Mahadevi Verma to the Legislative Council. She stayed in Lucknow for a long time and when questioned about Pantji she said—

> "Where can you find a leader of Pantji's stature? When I was nominated to the Legislative Council, I observed that Pantji left no stone unturned to promote literature and art. If he ever learnt about the difficulties of any writer or artist, it was impossible for him to not resolve those difficulties."

It was truly the golden era for Uttar Pradesh!

ANOTHER CHAPTER

Pantji was Chief Minister for seven and a quarter years. Although he was administering only one state, his fame was nationwide.

Nehruji coaxed Pantji to come to the Centre many times but he was not willing to leave Uttar Pradesh. It happened several times in the past also. However with

time, circumstances kept changing. Many of Nehruji's associates left for heavenly abode.

Rafi Ahmad Kidwai was a minister at the Centre and a close friend of Nehruji. After his demise Nehruji started feeling even more lonely.

He sent a message to Pantji expressing his feelings and requested him to accept the offer of joining him at the Centre. He wanted him to be a part of the cabinet at the Centre and share the responsibility of running the nation. Pantji was unable to refuse this time.

Dr. Sampurnanand was elected as the successor of Pantji. He respected Pantji as his mentor. He was a scholarly man and had written many important books. He was as firm about discipline as Pantji and formed his cabinet on 28 December.

It was the last day of the year 31 December 1954. Pantji was leaving his state, the state of Uttar Pradesh and going to join the Central Government. His colleagues were feeling sad and became emotional. Thousands of people rushed to the station to see Pantji off.

He was garlanded so many times that he was nearly drowned in flowers. Although he proceeded to Delhi, his heart remained in Lucknow.

New Delhi, was one more chapter in the industrious life of Pantji. The year 1955 proved to be a year of challenges for him. His appointment to the important post of Home Minister was announced on 10 January. The people of the country expressed their heart-felt

happiness. They had another iron man like Sardar Patel. At Maulana Azad Road near India Gate, there is a bungalow in the corner which is now called the Vice President's Residence. This bungalow was allotted to Pantji and it became his residence.

The bungalow in its folds envelops a great deal of history. Sardar Patel used to live there first and later it became the residence of Rafi Ahmad Kidwai and later still Maulana Azad began to reside there. All these leaders left for their heavenly abode in the bungalow and some superstitious people considered it unlucky.

When Pantji was given this information he laughed, "Don't people take birth and die in the same house? Do you quit the house thinking that it is unlucky? Therefore one should not talk of luck and bad luck. I would like to stay here...."

Pantji stayed in the house happily till the end of his days and that is: for a period of six years and three months. Afterwards Dr. Radhakrishnan and Dr. Zakir Hussein also resided in this bungalow. Now it is a permanent residence of the Vice President of India.

When Pantji entered the Parliament as Home Minister, he was greeted with loud applause. The members of the treasury bench were happy but the opposition's happiness was even more pronounced.

The country was confronted with many problems. There were many important external issues which required immediate attention but the internal issues were equally crucial. The bold manner in which Pantji faced these challenges is noteworthy.

There was the Kerala issue. Then the problem of Punjab. Besides, violence had been unleashed in As-

sam in the name of language. Kashmir was burning ceaselessly. Pantji encountered the problems one by one.

He had a new perspective. While he was affectionate by nature, he could be obstinate if the situation demanded. Truly, the country was in need of such a Home Minister at this critical juncture.

On 29 December 1953, a state reorganisation committee was appointed. The commission submitted its report two years later.

In December 1955, when the report was discussed in the Lok Sabha, it was coincidentally the day of eclipse. And truly, this issue created such an eclipse in the country later on that many pages of our history became hazy.

Pantji reorganised the states so efficiently that words are not enough to sing his praises. He was decorated with the Bharat Ratna for his services on 26 January 1957.

He found a solution to several complex issues. He gave the country a vision. He provided direction. His achievements are countless. When he was appointed the Chief Minister of the United Provinces only 10% of the population was literate. With limited means he had launched many important projects to increase literacy. He always claimed that it would be a great achievement if a literate person were to make an illiterate person literate.

For the upliftment of Harijans also his contribution is noteworthy. When the country was ablaze with communal riots he claimed in one of his speeches—

"Hindus and Muslims belong to the same race.

The same blood flows in our veins. It is a pity that they are not united. Fanaticism should be avoided. It can only lead to destruction. It hinders progress and we have to be rid of it. We should find a solution to our problems together. We have to undertake a long journey towards development."

A UNIQUE PERSONALITY

When Pantji visited Lucknow as Home Minister for the first time, he especially met Sampurnanandji before returning. People gave the meeting a mysterious hue but you would be surprised to learn what he had discussed with the Chief Minister that evening. He said, "I have come here with an important request. The person who was my chauffeur in Lucknow, is retiring in two or three months' time. It would be a great favour to him if he were to be granted an extension for one year. His daughter is to be married and he needs this job. He is still fit physically."

How could Sampurnanandji object! He was surprised that the Home Minister of India was so concerned even about an ordinary driver!

A few years before this event, Pantji was going to Lucknow from Delhi in his car when it hit an old man in the dark near Gajraula. The old man died on the spot. Pantji asked the driver to stop and sent information to the nearby village. People arrived to inform

that the old man was mentally disturbed and had run away from home.

Pantji arranged pension for the old widow for the rest of her life from his personal account. He cared for even the smallest matters concerning his friends and colleagues.

Once he sent five thousand rupees to Smt. Kidwai through Shri Umashankar Dixit. He also sent a message that 'Rafi Sahib's guests are many times more in number compared to the guests who eat in my house morning and evening. How can he manage the house with his limited income? Kindly keep the money. It will be of some help.'

He was not only a great administrator but a great personality too. One year after his arrival in Delhi, he once visited Kashmir. Addressing a meeting he said,

> "When Kashmir joined India, our statements at that time were correct. But given the changed circumstances, we have to evaluate them once again. We fully support the decision taken by the Kashmir Legislative Assembly. The wheel of time never moves backward, it can only more forward."

This gives an insight into his firm attitude towards Kashmir. Pantji stated in a straightforward manner what Nehruji could not.

His attitude was equally realistic on the issue of China. When the Prime Minister of China, Chou-En Lai visited India he is said to have confided to a foreign diplomat, "The Home Minister of India, Mr. Pant is so shrewd that it is very difficult to understand him and equally difficult to convince him."

Even the senior officers were afraid of him. Pantji used to read the entire draft and could recall what was written on every file.

Whatever he stated during Parliament sessions became law unto itself. He remembered all the facts and dictated his speeches as well as statements at home but never felt the need to read them in the house. He could reproduce every word verbatim and talk extempore for hours.

The secret of his success was that he would rectify the problem before it got worse! He was farsighted and capable of taking decisions at the right time.

He knew each and every officer of his province by name. Whenever an officer visited him in Lucknow, he would enquire, "What is the price of raw sugar in your area? What is the price of paddy?"

Pantji was widely aware of what was happening around. Sometimes he would surprise the officers with information they were ignorant of. This was the reason why all the officers felt nervous before him. One never knew what would be asked of them!

While in Delhi, Pantji became extremely busy. Besides he was nearly 72-73 years old. Many health problems had also crept in. Nevertheless he maintained his daily schedule and remained busy with people, files and issues from morning to evening.

Despite his tight schedules, he never neglected his family. He always found some time to spend with his children. He enjoyed their company and usually dined with the family. Every member of the family would be present at that hour.

At times he would go to India Gate for a stroll

with the children. He also enjoyed cultural programmes but hardly got an opportunity to see them.

When the Noble Laureate Rabindranath Tagore visited Delhi for the last time, his play *Chandalika* was being staged at AIFACS (All India Fine Arts and Crafts Society). Pantji forced his children to go and watch the play. He always made an effort to ensure that his children develop an interest in cultural activities.

He had great regard for artists and was also the President of Kashi Nagari Pracharini Sabha for quite a few years. Several cultural societies enjoyed his patronage. He left no stone unturned to promote the national language—Hindi.

THE LAST GLIMPSE

Pantji was enamoured by hills. Although he spent most of his life in Delhi and Lucknow, he cherished a special attachment to hills. To him the Himalayas were not just snow-clad mountains, they were 'divine' and he never missed an opportunity to visit them.

In the year 1960, he developed heart problem. Doctors refused to let him visit Nainital. High altitudes are harmful for heart patients but Pantji was longing to go there. Finally, one day he asked the doctor, "Is only Nainital out of bounds for me?"

The doctor smiled, "Nainital is at a high altitude and it is advisable to not to visit this place."

"Will a place at lower altitude also be harmful?"

Pantji smilingly enquired.

The doctor had to find a solution now. It was then decided that Pantji would go to Patuadangar instead of Nainital because it is at a lower altitude. In the morning he would go to Nainital by car and come back to Patuadangar by the evening. Pantji found immense solace in the refreshing and peaceful atmosphere.

His daughter-in-law Smt. Ila Pant accompanied him and we requested her to relate those memories—

> "It was June-July. And his last visit to Nainital. The last time that he would glance around Nainital. He sat outside the bungalow in the mild sunshine and looked at the mountains. He gazed at the clouds hovering above the mountains and watched their reflection sink in the Naini Lake. He stared unblinkingly at the lake for a long time. Somewhere in his sensitive heart he seemed to know that it was the last glimpse!"

THE LAST JOURNEY

Pantji became unwell on returning to Delhi. Problems surrounded him. His doctors advised not to exert but he was heedless. As though he had vowed to remain absorbed in his work till the last breath.

20 February 1961.

Delhi was comparatively colder that year. The winter session of Parliament was on. Pantji was in parliament all day long. The last four or five days had

been hectic with debates and Pantji had to prepare a detailed reply to be submitted the day after. He never took anything lightly. He prepared his answers giving attention to every detail.

That evening also he was busy preparing the answer. He was dictating to Janki Babu, his personal assistant. Although he dictated his statements, he never felt the need to refer back to them in Parliament.

While dictating that day, he felt uneasy and asked Janki to call Sen Babu (the Law Minister Ashok Sen) immediately.

Shri Sen used to reside nearby at 5 Hastings Road. On receiving the phone call, he rushed over to find Pantji in a sorry state. But Pantji continued with the dictation. Sen noticed that he was slowly deteriorating. Pantji apparently wanted to explain so many things but was unable to speak. He could only say, "You take these notes. You may read them...."

He attempted a few words in Hindi and then uttered the last few words in Kumaon language. Thereafter, he collapsed.

Pantji remained in coma for 17 days. Dr. Bidhan Chandra Rai, the Chief Minister of West Bengal rushed from Calcutta. Experts from abroad were also summoned but there was no improvement in his condition.

Pandit Nehru came to see him everyday. Smt. Vijayalakshmi Pandit also came regularly and so did many other prominent leaders. There was a crowd of well-wishers.

On the morning of 7 March, Pantji left for his heavenly abode from amidst millions of weeping eyes. A large crowd surged forward to pay their last homage.

Manekshaw himself was looking after the arrangements. The chiefs of all the three wings of the defence forces were also present. The President, Vice President, ministers, in fact every one. An atmosphere of deep mourning prevailed all around.

A number of complex issues confronted the country. There was the issue of Pakistan and the issue of China. There were internal threats which were equally alarming in magnitude. Punjab, Nagaland, Assam—everywhere the dark clouds of turmoil were descending. Pandit Nehru was in need of a strong companion made of metal, farsighted and reliable. A companion of the stature of Govind Ballabh Pant.

Strong, sturdy and solemn as the Himalayas, Pantji was gifted with exceptional talent. He knew how to lead the country through the overshadowing whirlpool of problems. He knew the path from darkness to a gleaming golden future. After Sardar Patel, the nation had yet to see an administrator of such determination.

In the years to come, his name will be remembered with great respect, regard and love. And in the annals of history his name will be written in golden letters as one of the founders of India.

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